

The Blood Bank Fellowship Celebrates Its 50th Anniversary

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From left to right: CDR Michael Libby, COL Stephen Beardsley, COL Francisco Rentas, Mr. Bill Turcan.

Officers from the Navy, Air Force and Army gathered at an elegant evening reception recently in Silver Spring, MD, to celebrate the military's Blood Banking Fellowship Program's 50th anniversary. Program alumni took the opportunity to remember the good times and laugh at the hard times when they were students. Now leaders in the blood banking industry, they applaud those who follow in their footsteps; this year's

outstanding graduates of the Specialist in Blood Banking (SBB) program.

"The military Blood Bank Fellowship graduates are the backbone of the Armed Services Blood Program and I've had the privilege of knowing the majority of the fellowship graduates," stated the program's most senior graduate at the 50th anniversary celebration, COL (Ret.) Tony Polk, U.S. Army.

With a highly competitive admission process, the 18-month program is offered to military medical technologists who are first nominated, and then selected from all three branches of the Armed Services. Officers earn academic credit for didactic and clinical training while enrolled in the Fellowship program. These credits are applied toward a Master of Science in Health Sciences degree in the Field of Immunohematology granted by the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Since the program's establishment in 1958, the BFF has saluted 100 Army, 51 Air Force, 42 Navy, two civilians, and one international military graduates.

"These students are wonderful. With absolutely no exception, these people are extremely committed to their education as well as their military careers," explains Judy Sullivan, SBB instructor and AABB (formerly the American Association of Blood Banks) Accreditation Programs Manager.

With over 20 years of experience in the blood banking field and numerous years of teaching experience, Judy knows the value of keeping her students focused until the end of the program. "I cover five to six lectures over the year but the one I'm known for is the six-hour 'Rh' lecture, discussing the antigen that determines an important part of an individual's blood type. That's the one where I bring in cheesecake for the students..."

Bolstered no doubt by Judy's now famous cheesecake, the three graduates of this year's SBB program developed a video to commemorate the program and all those former

fellows who have helped to create and been champions of the Armed Services Blood Program military blood banking industry of today. The video was a highlight of the evening as evidenced by loud cheers and enthusiastic applause.

“The students started pulling information together for the video in October 2007 and finished in early June 2008,” explains Navy Lieutenant Leslie Riggs. As class leader and one of the recent graduates, LT Riggs oversaw the video production at every stage and credits Bill Turcan, education coordinator for the fellowship program, for the use of his article *Fellowship of the Ring*, on which the video was based on, as well as his tremendous help throughout the process and his overall guidance through the rigorous program.



The traditional raspberry and lemon Blood Bank Fellowship cake.

“Knowing that what we do is lifesaving, that it brings people back from the battlefield or the surgery room so they can be with their families- that is pretty powerful inspiration,” explains LT Riggs on how he stays motivated while balancing a military career, studies, and family time. Judy adds: “I have such an appreciation for this field; knowing that there are people who are committed to having a safe blood supply is very reassuring to me. If the need ever arises, I know a family member of mine would

be in good hands.”

“Although the students do a tremendous job, the civilian teachers, laboratory and blood bank professionals, spouses, and family members are the ones who support and ultimately shape the military BBF graduates into the leaders who ensure the success of the Armed Services Blood Program mission,” explains Commander Michael Libby, Director of the Armed Services Blood Program Office (ASBPO) and BBF graduate.

If you would like to find out more about the Specialist in Blood Banking Program, please visit the Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) website www.militaryblood.dod.mil and click on the *Fellowship Program* tab. Please stay tuned for posting of the BBF video.